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ABSTRACT

The issue emphasizes decision-making skills. Human beings are constantly confronted with choices in all aspects of life. The five basic skill categories in the decision-making process are identified and explained: (1) Conceptualizing; (2) Sequencing; (3) Creating Alternative Sequences; (4) Evaluating Alternatives; and (5) Implementing a Decision. Included are teaching activities for levels Pre-K: "How Do I Choose?"; 1-2: "It's up to Me"; levels 3-4: "Everyday Decisions"; and levels 5-6: "Town Planners." Each contains a list of student goals and a description of teaching activities which incorporate role playing, reasoning, group discussion, sharing experiences, group dynamics, group decision-making, and oral presentation. (KWL)

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The
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DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

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Decision-Making Skills

by Dr. H. Michael Hartoonian and Dr. Margaret A. Laughlin

Dr. Hartoonian is supervisor of social studies education for the state of Wisconsin. He is also on the board of the Wisconsin State Council on Economic Education and adjunct professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Laughlin is an associate professor of education and the director of the Center for Economic Education at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay.

The discipline of economics is built upon the notion that human beings are constantly confronted with making choices concerning the allocation and use of scarce natural, capital, and human resources. Decision making is a fact of life and the form of reasoning underlying this process, whether called "cost-benefit analysis," "utility maximization," or simply the "economic way of thinking," provides citizens with a dynamic key to the door of economic understanding.

ELEMENTS OF DECISION MAKING

We have identified five basic skill categories in the decision-making process. And, while many economic decisions can be made without using all of these skills, the following are included for consideration here: (**1**) expanding a conceptual framework, (**2**) understanding sequence, (**3**) developing alternative sequences, (**4**) evaluating alternatives, and (**5**) implementing or carrying out a decision

By looking at the above skills used in decision making and applying them to a typical situation facing elementary students, teachers will better understand how the process works and how it relates to students' lives.

USING THE MODEL

The following story which focuses on an economic problem, is used to illustrate the skills in the decision-making model:

Mary and Mark are twins who are celebrating their ninth birthday. Their grandparents have given them each fifteen dollars as a birthday gift. The grandparents suggest that part of the money should be put in the twins' savings accounts, but the rest may be spent. The decision of how much to save is left to the children. Mark and Mary go off to spend part of their gift money. After visiting several stores, they make a list of possible purchases, and then discuss what to buy. They have found many more items than their money will allow them to purchase.

The task is to help the twins make choices by working through the decision-making process. The skills we've identified can be demonstrated by using the teaching techniques and questions below:

1. Conceptualizing

For elementary students, perhaps the most important skill in the process of decision making is that of *conceptualizing*, or forming a clear description of the issue or problem at hand. Conceptualizing may be successfully achieved through the development of a story about the economic concept to be learned. This places the problem in a temporal and spatial context. Students could be asked to respond to the story by drawing a picture, acting out the story, or writing about the situation. These activities should stimulate questions regarding facts, definitions, and values which will help students clarify the issue. This in turn leads students to formulate more questions, generate hypotheses, and seek additional information.

Focus questions may include the following: What is the economic problem or issue, and how can it be stated? What are the individual's goals in the situation? In economics it is assumed that individuals seek to optimize their satisfaction; though people share many common goals and values, what satisfies one person, does not necessarily satisfy another. Relative to the story above, students might be asked, "What are Mark's and Mary's goals?" (e.g., getting a specific item now, saving money for future spending) "What are Mark's and Mary's economic and social goals?" If there is a conflict between these goals, students should consider the opportunity costs and renew their priorities. For example, if most of the money is spent now, they won't be able to save very much for future purchases.

2. Sequencing

The second skill, *sequencing*, allows students to note patterns and develop links between elements of the "story." Within this skill category, students learn to ask questions about the cause/effect relationship between events, or the costs and benefits of alternative action. Thinking about consequences — positive and negative, planned and unplanned — is at the heart of this skill.

For our story, students might formulate questions that Mary and Mark need to ask to make a decision, using an "if/then" format. For example, *if* they put their money together, *then* they might be able to buy a more expensive gift they could share (e.g., a Trivial Pursuit game). But, *if* they keep their money separate, *then* each can make a more personal choice. Students could make a list of the possible choices Mark and Mary might make, and hypothesize about the consequences of those decisions.

3. Creating Alternative Sequences

The third skill category addresses the notion of *creating alternative sequences* in response to "what if" questions (e.g., "What if we spend all of our money and save none?") Frequently, decision makers have more alternatives available to them than are immediately obvious. Generating these alternatives, or

(continued on back page)

How Do I Choose?

by Avanda Trammell and Dr. Joel Hausler

Avanda Trammell is a Career Level 2 Resource Teacher at David Youree Elementary School in Smyrna, Tennessee. She works with gifted students and develops economics curricula. Joel Hausler is an assistant professor and Director of the Center for Economic Education at Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro.

Decision-Making Skills

Most of us make hundreds of decisions every day with little thought about the processes involved. As children, we learn patterns of decision making that stay with us throughout our lives. What do we teach children about the decision-making process and the consequences of making one choice from many options? Preschool and nursery school children may be given the opportunity to choose one toy over another, or ice cream rather than candy. Although these choices may not seem of great consequence, to a young child they are very important. Children should be taught those skills that are helpful in making "big" and "small" decisions. With such skills children will find decision making less frustrating, and will learn to consider their options and the outcomes of their choices. As educators and adults, we have the opportunity to help children derive more satisfaction from their decisions. The decision-making skills children learn will benefit them now and in the future.

Student Goals

1. Understand the concept of choice and recognize that there are options to be considered in making a decision.
2. Realize that decisions have both positive and negative consequences.
3. Recognize that personal taste and values affect the decisions we make.
4. Realize that sometimes our decisions are influenced by cost, scarcity, and other people.
5. Realize that people make decisions every day and should take responsibility for them.

Teaching Activities

I. A Wise Little Pig

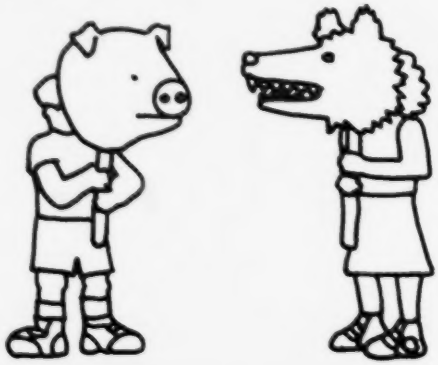
listening • role playing • reasoning

To teach children the process of decision making and that decisions have consequences, read the class the story of *The Three Little Pigs*. The consequences of the pigs' decisions may be well known to the students but they might not have considered why the pigs made the decisions they did, and what other options they might have had.

Tell the class that you are going to read them a story of *The Three Little Pigs* and although many of them know the story, they must pay close attention because you are going to stop at certain places to ask them questions about the pigs' decisions. Begin the story and stop reading after the first pig has built his house. Ask: (1) How did you think the little pig felt when his house was finished? (proud) (2) Why do you think the pig chose to build his house of *straw*? (He met a man selling a bundle of straw. He might have thought it would be easy to build a straw house.) Continue reading and stop after the wolf has blown down the pig's house. Ask (3) What happened to the pig's house? (4) What would happen to his house if there was a big storm? . . . .an earthquake? . . . .if it was a sunny day?

Stop reading the story at the same points—after the second and third pig have built their houses, and when they encounter the wolf. Direct similar questions to the class. When asking why the second pig built his house of *sticks* (question 2), responses might be: he met a man selling a bundle of sticks; he thought he could afford the sticks; he might not have known how to build any other type of house. At the end of the story ask the class:

(1) Which pig made the best choice? (Note to teacher: in economics "best" implies the optimal use of resources to achieve one's goals.)
(2) What did the third pig think about that the others did not? (Building a house that would last; and one that would keep him safe from the wolf and from bad storms.)
(3) What do you think the first two little pigs learned? (That a house of straw and a house of sticks are not strong enough to protect them from the wolf.)
(4) If they had the chance to build their houses again, do you think they might use something besides straw/sticks? What else could they use? What are *your* houses made of?



PARENT CORNER: *If your child asks for a pet, discuss some of the factors that must be considered in making such a decision (type, size, care, cost, space, etc.), so your child understands the reasons behind your decision.*

The story of *The Three Little Pigs* may be supplemented with puppet making and role playing. Have four students act out the roles of the pigs and the wolf. (Simple costumes and materials may be used.) Instruct the other children to ask questions of the actors to find out *why* the little pigs acted as they did. (Perhaps the house of straw and the house of sticks were easier, or took less time, to build; perhaps the first two pigs wanted to save money, since bricks would have cost more.)

II. Decorating Decisions

construction • planning • weighing options

A follow-up activity to the previous one is that of house building and decorating. Students may be given cardboard boxes to use as houses. Help the children cut window and door openings. Then let the students paint or decorate their houses using old magazine ads, wallpaper samples, fabric, etc. As the children are working, ask them how they decide what to use to decorate each room. Which pieces of fabric, wallpaper, etc., do they prefer? Why? (color, design, pictures in ads, etc.) Explain to the children that they are making decisions/choices based upon their personal taste or preference. Many times our personal tastes and values affect the decisions we make about what we wear, how we have our hair cut/styled, what colors we use to decorate our rooms, etc. When we make these decisions, our goal is to be satisfied or happy with the results.

III. Family Matters

group discussion • sharing experiences

These activities may be set up as informal discussions with the children sitting in a circle. Since the topics relate to family activities, the children may be given the opportunity to gather information from family members first, as a "homework assignment." The questions reinforce that many times other people influence our decisions, and that choosing one item means giving up another.

A. Dining Out Decisions

Ask students about the last time they went out to eat with their families. What were some of the choices that had to be made? (Where to go, when to go, what kind of food to eat, etc.) What choices did the students get to participate in—i.e., was the decision to eat out an individual or group decision? How did they decide what to eat? Could they choose anything on the menu? What did they give up when they made a choice?

B. Cartoon Choices

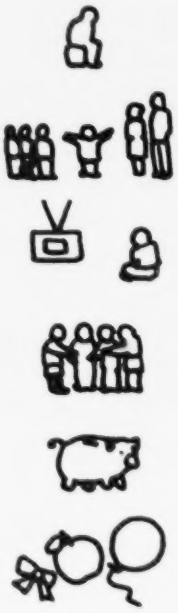
Ask the students if they like to watch cartoons on Saturday mornings. What are their favorite shows? How do they decide what to watch? If they have brothers/sisters, does this make a difference in what they get to watch? If, for example, your brother wants to watch *Bugs Bunny* but you want to watch *The Smurfs* at the same time, what do you do? Are there shows your parents will not let you watch? Do parents help you choose good programs? Suppose you could watch two televisions at one time, what would happen? Would you enjoy both shows as much as one?

IV. People Make Costly Choices

observation • reasoning • role playing

As a culminating activity, take the students on a field trip to a grocery/variety store. (If a field trip is not possible, this activity could be done in school. Set up a store and use play money and cut-outs of objects from advertisements or catalogues.) Tell the students that they will be given a set amount of money to spend and that they must decide what to buy in the store. (If money is not available from a school fund, write a note to parents asking each family to contribute 50¢ for this choice-making activity.) Before you leave the classroom, ask the children what items they expect to see at the store (candy, chips, gum, crackers, etc.) and what they think some of them will cost. Point out to the children that once the money is spent they will not be given any *more* money, and that they may not trade or exchange what they buy. Tell them you want them to be happy with their choices so they must take their time and make the best decision possible.

After returning to school, talk about the choice each student made and how each made it. Ask: "How did you make *your* choice?



- Did you make your decision yourself?
- Did you ask friends or others (teacher, aide, parent) for advice?
- Did you see your treat advertised on TV?
- Did any of you pool your money? Why?
- Did you save part or all of your money? If so, why?
- What were some of the things you could have bought, but didn't?

Why didn't you buy the other choices? Do you think any of your classmates made better choices than you did? Why?

This activity helps children realize that sometimes their decisions are influenced by others, and that *all* people make economic decisions every day. Ask the students if their parents have made any purchases lately. How did their parents decide what to buy? Explain that their parents think about what they buy before they spend their money, so they'll be satisfied with their decisions.

Teaching Activities 1-2

It's Up To Me

by Patricia Popple and Dr. Jerry Johnson

Patricia Popple is Principal at Locust Lane and Robbins Elementary Schools, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Her master's thesis was devoted to the study of staff development in economics education. Dr. Jerry Johnson is professor of Economics and Director of the Center for Economic Education at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire.

Decision-Making Skills

Primary school age youngsters are confronted daily with issues regarding unlimited wants and limited resources. Trips to supermarkets, shopping malls and theaters often reveal the difficulties children and parents have with the problem of scarcity as it relates to time, space, money, energy and other resources.

Since scarcity exists, children and adults face decisions and choices in every aspect of life. Decision-making skills will help children learn how to make wise decisions.

Student Goals

1. Realize that people's (consumer's) wants are unlimited.
2. Understand that limited resources and unlimited wants cause scarcity problems.
3. Recognize that when things are scarce, people must make choices.
4. Demonstrate problem solving skills by considering alternative solutions and the consequences of each.

Teaching Activities

I. Dreams and Reality

ranking • categorizing • language arts

This activity demonstrates that people's wants are unlimited. To begin the lesson have the children brainstorm about things they want. Ask them to think about things they have dreamed about having one day (a horse, a new bicycle). Then have the children share their "wants" with their classmates. Ask two or three children to come to the chalkboard to list three items they want. (Help with spelling!) Now ask the three children which item is most important to them, or which do they want most of all. Have them rank their three "wants," indicating by number which they want most (1), next (2), and least (3). Children at their desks may do the same.

Now ask the three children why they want *most* the items they ranked first. What are their reasons for wanting each item? Have other children share *their* ideas with the class.

From magazines or catalogues, cut pictures of items that the children will probably *not* be able to obtain. (Include pictures of a few things from the children's lists.) Paste them onto a white paper cloud or onto large paper stars to create a bulletin board display entitled, *Dream On* or *Reach for the Stars*. Explain to the class that many of these things may be out of their reach right now, just like the stars. Ask the children, "Why are they out of reach? Why can't you have them all?" After the children respond, include reasons such as (1) their parents cannot afford them, (2) they may not have enough space, (3) they may not be appropriate or practical for their age group, or (4) their parents may not have the time/energy to shop for them. Explain that there are many things that their teachers or parents would like also, but can't have because of lack of money, space, time, etc. Give an example of an item you dream of having some day. (Mimeograph a note to parents asking them to discuss this topic at home with their child.)

Now ask the class to look at their "wants" lists and think about which ones they are likely to have some day. Step by step, lead children to classify their lists of "wants" according to those they (a) probably will have some day, (b) probably won't get some day, and (c) don't know if they'll get. Instruct them to explain in an oral or written statement, why they can't have an item at the *present* time, but might be able to have it at a *later* date (e.g., a computer, a trip to Disney World).

A categorizing activity may be created by asking the children to group their "wants" by types of things. Write on the board, "things to play with," "things to eat," "place to go," etc. Ask children to come to the board, name one of their "wants," and point to the group in which it belongs.

II. Scarcity Leads to Choices

math • discussion • decision making

To introduce the concept of scarcity, tell the class that they will be making a picture on large construction paper of one thing they dream of having some day. Hand out the paper, but have enough for only half of the class. When students start complaining that they haven't got a piece, ask them what the problem is. Then ask the class, "What are we going to do? We don't have enough. We have a *scarcity* problem!" Explain that when there isn't enough we must decide what to do to solve the problem. Ask the class if they can think of a solution that's fair to everyone. (Cut each paper in half.)

This activity demonstrates that choices must be made because many times people's wants are greater than the resources available. Bring to class a plate of cupcakes, cookies, or snacks that number less than the total number of students. Have the children count the number of classmates as well as the number of treats to be shared. Question the children: If the treats are

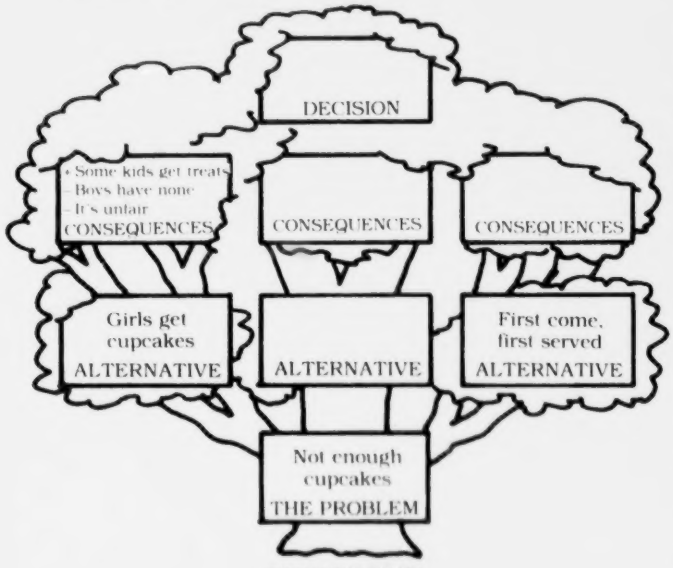
PARENT CORNER: *A conversation about allowances can provide you with the opportunity to teach your child about unlimited wants, limited resources, and the need to make choices and decisions.*

given out to your classmates, will there be enough to go around? How will you feel if some of you get a snack and others don't? What is our problem? (Too many students given the number of treats, or not enough treats for all the students.)

Using the "Decision Tree" approach to problem solving, elicit what children believe to be the problem. (See illustration.) Starting at the base of the tree, write in the problem, "Not enough treats for everyone." (An overhead transparency or a chalkboard drawing may be used to guide children through the process.) Ask the class if anyone can think of a solution. If a student suggests, "Give only the girls cupcakes," write that in one of the boxes marked "alternative" as a possible solution. Then ask the class, "What would happen if we did that? What would be the consequences?" (Boys wouldn't get any; it would be unfair; some people get treats.) Each consequence may be marked positive (+) or negative (–), depending upon whether the children think the result is good or bad.

Ask the children to come up with one or two other solutions and help them figure out the consequences of each. Then ask the class to decide which solution they think is best and why. As a math challenge, have the children figure out how the treats may be evenly distributed. Let them enjoy the rewards of decision making!

To conclude, state that it was not possible for each child to have one cupcake because they didn't have the ingredients, time, or equipment (oven, bowl, etc.) available to make *more* cupcakes. Therefore, they had to decide how everyone could get a share. Explain that it is not possible for *all* people to have *all* the things (goods and services) they want, because resources are limited, so people must decide what to produce and what to buy.



DECISION TREE

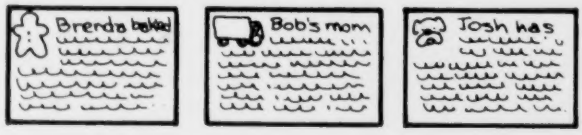
III. Group Problem Solving

group dynamics • oral presentation • reasoning

Pose other practical problems to allow children the opportunity to gain additional experience in using the "Decision Tree" model. Once the entire class has become knowledgeable and proficient in working through the process, divide the class into 4 or 5 groups and give each group a common problem to provide a social decision-making activity. Explain each problem verbally or print it on a card with an accompanying picture. (It is suggested that only one problem be assigned at a time to the groups.) Appoint a leader and a recorder for each group.

Distribute a worksheet showing the "Decision Tree" outline and boxes, and instruct the groups to fill them in as they discuss each problem. Each group should read the "problem card," decide upon the problem, the alternative solutions, the positive and negative consequences, and finally, their decision. After each group reaches a decision, ask the recorder to read the group's decision to the class. Ask group leaders and members to discuss why they thought their decision was the best one.

The following problems may be used with primary grade children. Instruct the groups to follow the same procedure for each problem. As you hand out the "problem card" to each group, read it aloud.



Problem One: (Picture of gingerbread man cookie)
Brenda baked a large batch of gingerbread cookies and planned to decorate them with raisin eyes, mouth, nose and three buttons. When she got half way through decorating, she ran out of raisins. What should she do to solve the problem?

Problem Two: (Picture of toy truck)
Bob's mom gave him $4.25 for lunch money on Monday morning. On the bus trip to school, Troy told Bob he'd give him the new truck he'd gotten for his birthday in exchange for the money. What should Bob do?

Problem Three: (Picture of puppy)
Josh has saved $50.00 to buy a puppy. He has been to the pet shop many times and seen just the right type and color of puppy that he and his parents want. When Josh goes to buy the puppy he finds that the price has gone up to $60.00. What should Josh do?

IV. Resolving Story Problems

reading • listening • comprehension

There are an abundance of economic problems posed in literature written for primary school children. The following stories may be used to teach the concept of scarcity as a basis for lessons on decision making: *The Little Match Girl* (Anderson), *Seven Little Popovers* (Eastwick), *Gia and the One Hundred Dollars of Bubblegum* (Asch), and *Stone Soup* (Brown).

A bibliography of stories and articles containing economic ideas is available from the Joint Council on Economic Education. Its fifth edition of *Learning Economics through Children's Stories* annotates over 250 listings, all cross-classified by economic concept.

Teaching Activities 3-4

Everyday Decisions

by Rosemary Davis and John Hail

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Decision-Making Skills

Children make decisions every day of their lives. They decide what to wear, who to play with, what to buy for a birthday gift, to name just a few. Most are made very easily without much thought given to the consequences of their choices. However, as children mature, their decisions become more important, and many children have difficulty with decision making. How do children learn to make intelligent decisions? One way is to provide children with opportunities to practice decision making in the classroom.

Student Goals

1. Practice decision making regarding classroom privileges.
2. Understand that decisions must be made because time, money (tokens), and some items are scarce.
3. Learn to consider the possible alternatives in making a decision.
4. Realize that many decisions have positive and negative consequences.
5. Weigh the opportunity costs of a decision.

Teaching Activities

I. Token Decisions

group decision making • weighing alternatives

This activity provides students with the opportunity to make decisions in the classroom. It relies on a token system to create a contrived scarcity problem. Tokens are limited and students must decide whether to buy extra classroom privileges. These privileges are opportunities to do things that are not part of the normal classroom routine. The teacher decides what privileges are appropriate for his/her classroom—suggested activities might be: (1) student choosing the location of his/her desk, (2) leaving the classroom to get a drink of water outside of the usual time, (3) going to the school library when classroom work is completed, (4) going to a recreation corner of the classroom to do puzzles, games, etc., (5) sharpening pencils at times when it's not usually allowed.

There are two constants in the token system. In order to receive *income* (tokens), students *must* come to school. Each day a student comes to school, he/she receives one token. (This income is not the same as wages received for work done.) Also, students have a mandatory *expense* each week. They *must* pay three tokens per week for desk/chair rental. Rental charges may be started after students have had time to acquire tokens. These two requirements can create an opportunity for group decision making, regarding such questions as:

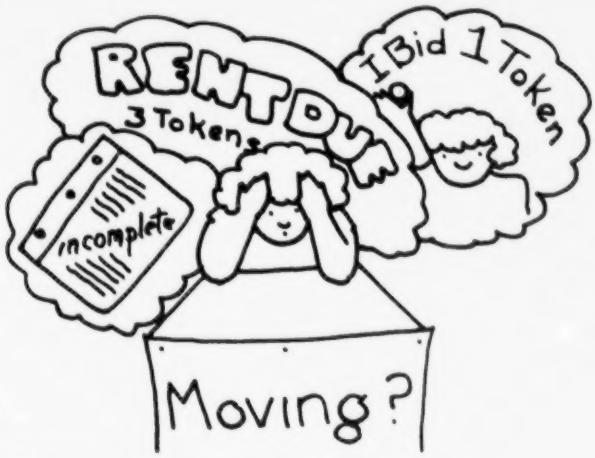
- If a student is absent, does he/she still receive income?
- If a student doesn't come to school, is he/she still responsible for paying desk/chair rental for the full week?
- If a student doesn't have the rental fee because the token was "spent" on something else, should a penalty be assigned?

Be sure that students realize that tokens may be used not only to buy privileges, but also in a few weeks they will be able to use them to buy things at a classroom auction. Those who have saved more tokens will have more buying or bidding power.

Before initiating the token activity make cardboard tokens (these could be small squares, cut with a paper cutter) or use play money or poker chips. When a student decides to "buy" a privilege, a token must be deposited in a conveniently-placed box or envelope. This informal method is easier for the teacher and gives children the responsibility of being honest when making payments. If theft is a problem, develop a classroom bank or advise students to leave their savings at home and only bring small amounts to school.

Explain to the class how tokens are received and how rent is paid. Regarding the buying of privileges, explain that they will begin taking more responsibility for decisions they make in the classroom—and that these decisions will cost tokens. For example, if a student wants the privilege of leaving the room for a drink of water, the student must consider the *cost* involved and other ways that he/she might want to use that token. (Students may also think about more productive ways to use their time.) When resources (tokens) are limited, students should begin to consider other *alternatives* (e.g., waiting to get a drink when it won't cost a token; deciding the drink isn't necessary; saving the token to use at the auction; etc.) Students should begin to weigh the *consequences* of their decisions, and consider such questions as: "What do I want more, the token or a new place to sit in the classroom? If I spend the token, will it be worth it? If I sit near my friend will I be able to get my work done? Will I need the token to pay rent? Will I want it to buy something at auction?" Students will begin to realize that all decisions have consequences and that when resources are limited, decisions should be made more carefully.

PARENT CORNER: *Allow your child to plan his/her wardrobe for a week. Suggest that s/he consult daily weather reports and consider activities happening at school, so a knowledgeable decision may be made.*



II. Auction Choices

goal setting • oral language skills

After the token system has been in operation a few weeks, begin weekly auctions. A classroom auction can provide an enjoyable opportunity for students to spend tokens they have saved and, when they auction-off their own items, to increase their tokens.

In the classroom auction students learn that the number of items available is limited, and that their tokens are limited, therefore, they can't always have what they want. Students must learn to set goals and make some decisions quickly. They must weigh the possibility of a more desirable item being offered later, and the chance they have of being the highest bidder. Students who are bidding are trying to get the best item for their money.

At the first auction, offer a few items that children would want (i.e., a pencil box, a joke book, a ticket to have lunch with the teacher, a special treat), and place one item on the auction table at a time so students won't be aware of the other options. This introduces the element of chance—whether something better will be offered later. After each highest bidder has acquired his/her "purchase," ask each student, "Are you satisfied with what you got? Do you think you paid too much for it? Will you be able to save enough tokens for rent or for next week's auction? Will you be able to buy privileges next week?"

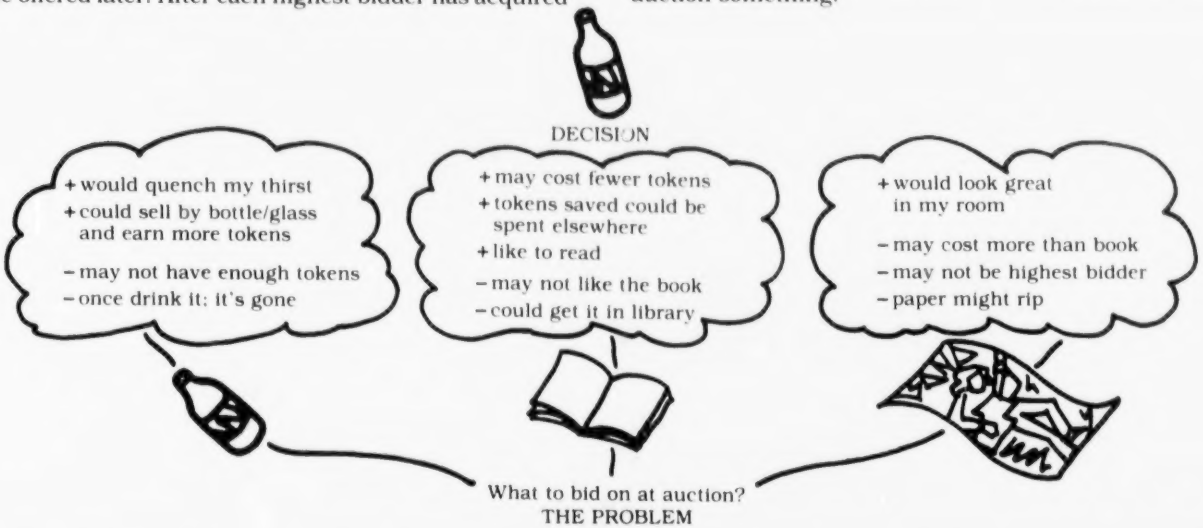
At the next auction sell a quart bottle of soda pop with three paper cups, a popular book, and a poster. Display all the items on the auction table. These are the three alternatives from which students can choose. After the highest bidder has bought each item, analyze the decision-making process each student used. For example, ask the student who got the soda the following questions:

- When you saw the three items, which did you decide you wanted most?
- What were some of the positive and negative thoughts you had when trying to decide on which item to bid the highest?

Make a chart on the board listing the ideas the student had regarding winning each of the items (the soda, book and poster). Place a plus sign (+) next to those the student viewed as positive and a minus sign (–) next to those viewed as negative. Then ask:

- What happened when you weighed the consequences of having each of those items? (decided on the soda)
- Are you satisfied with your choice?

The next week allow five students at a time to bring to school one item from home that they want to auction. When selecting an item to auction, students should weigh the "opportunity cost" of their decision, i.e., they should decide whether the opportunity to earn tokens is more valuable to them than giving up the item. (Will they earn enough so they'll be satisfied?) A note must be sent home to parents explaining the purpose of the auction activity and giving examples of appropriate items (limit value and size). Allowing students to auction an item of their own gives them an opportunity to practice speaking in front of the class and an opportunity to earn extra tokens. Make certain each student in the class has a chance to auction something.


DECISION
+ would quench my thirst
+ could sell by bottle/glass and earn more tokens
– may not have enough tokens
– once drink it; it's gone
+ may cost fewer tokens
+ tokens saved could be spent elsewhere
+ like to read
– may not like the book
– could get it in library
+ would look great in my room
– may cost more than book
– may not be highest bidder
– paper might rip
What to bid on at auction?
THE PROBLEM

Town Planners

by Emmett Cotter and Deborah Hayes

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Decision-Making Skills

Children hear every day about changes in their environment and about concerns grown-ups have regarding decisions that are made. Many of these decisions affect the community, city, state, or the country in which we live. Fifth and sixth graders may start to question some of the social decisions being made by the "decision makers." Young people will respect decisions more when they understand the process used in decision making. Hopefully, this simulation lesson will help students practice good decision-making skills which will help them become wise decision makers in the future.

Student Goals

1. Understand how the process of decision making is used to allocate space and resources when planning and building a community.
2. Develop and use a decision-making grid in planning a model town and in analyzing the location of buildings.
3. Analyze local issues relative to preserving open space and continued development.
4. Evaluate the locations of actual buildings in the students' own town/city.

Teaching Activities

I. My Town, USA

civics • map skills • decision making

This activity gives students the opportunity to design a "model town" using a decision-making process.

The following materials are needed for this lesson: a large sheet of paper or a twin bedsheet, sheets of colored construction paper, paste, tape, stapler, different sized milk/dairy cartons, colored felt markers.

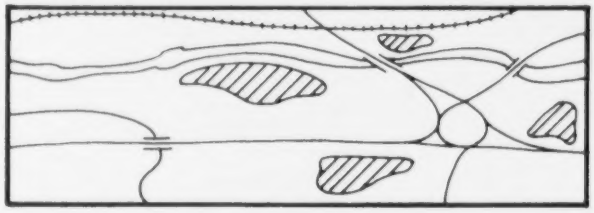
Explain to the class that they will be involved in a group decision-making activity in which they will pretend they are town planners who have the opportunity to create a new town. Relate this to Disney World in Florida where, in order to create a huge recreation complex, planners had to design roads and transportation systems, waterways, utility systems, amusement facilities, storage and service buildings, restaurants, hotels, etc. However, instead of designing our model town on a blueprint, we will create a map of it on a blank sheet. Remind students that since towns continually grow and change, the "planning" of a town is a dynamic process that is never finished.

PROCEDURE:

1. Before the first class, use a large sheet of paper or a twin bedsheet and draw a river on the sheet with a blue marker. (See illustration below.)

2. Ask the class to decide on three or four different areas that will be green open spaces or woods. If you want these green areas to remain the same throughout the activity, draw and fill them in on the sheet with a green marker (similar to the way national parks are shown on maps). If you want to allow for the possibility of open spaces being used for building and development, make green paper cut-outs in various shapes to represent these areas and staple or tape them onto the sheet. (See illustration below.)

3. To expedite the activity, a highway, secondary roads and a railroad track should be drawn on the sheet. As the town grows, new roadways and railroad tracks may be added.

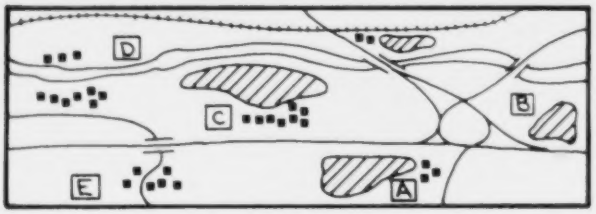


4. Ask the class what they think should be the *first* buildings to be constructed in their town. (Their homes.) Give the students empty ½ pint milk cartons to represent their homes. Students may cover their homes with construction paper, then place them where they choose on the map. Ask students why they chose their location.

5. After their homes are situated, ask the class what they think are the five most important buildings their town needs. (Students might suggest: town hall, hospital, school, factory, and supermarket). After the class has decided on the five buildings, list them on the board. Ask students to explain *why* each building is important. What goods or services does each building provide? (e.g., lawmaking/governing, medical care, education, new products, food and household items.)

6. Students will now use a decision-making process to determine where to locate each of the five buildings in their town. Beforehand, select five possible locations on the town map. Label each A, B, C, D, or E on a small piece of paper, then tape each letter to the spot on the sheet. These are the five *alternative* locations.

PARENT CORNER: *Help your child find a newspaper article about a proposed change within your state, city, or town, and discuss the possible outcomes and consequences of this change.*



The class will decide where to locate each building *one at a time*. To decide what is an appropriate place for each building, ask the students, "What should be considered when choosing a location for the hospital (for example)?" Have the class decide on at least three *criteria* that should be used to determine what would be a *good* location for the hospital. Students might suggest: (1) low noise factor, (2) easy access to roads, and (3) scenic view, as the criteria that should be evaluated when looking at locations for the hospital.

Create a "Decision Grid" (see illustration) on the chalkboard for the first building (the hospital, in this case). List the five alternative locations vertically, and the three criteria horizontally.

Note: A new decision-making grid is used for each building, since students should be asked, "What criteria do you think should be considered in locating *this* building?" In trying to decide where to locate a factory, for example, students may feel that: (1) access to railroad, (2) distance from homes, or (3) access to highway, are important criteria to evaluate. The five locations remain the same on each grid.

7. In this step, students complete the decision-making grid for the first building. Ask the class to examine the map of their town and observe where roadways, green spaces, etc., are situated. Then, have them look at each location and judge to what extent *that* location meets each of the criteria. Ask, "How does location A meet each of the criteria for the hospital?" Students may decide that location A is: very good regarding low noise, not particularly accessible to the roadways, and good regarding its scenic value. (See illustration.)

Decision Grid for the Hospital

Alternatives	Criteria			
	low noise	access/ roads	scenic view	other
A	+ +	−	+	
B				
C				

Select a student to write a plus or minus in the appropriate box of the grid as the class decides *to what extent* that location meets each criteria. Multiple pluses or minuses should be used to emphasize the strength of their response. Students follow the same procedure in looking at and evaluating the other possible sites (B, C, D, and E) for the hospital.

8. Following the same steps used in completing a grid for the hospital, have the class complete a grid for *each* of the remaining buildings. When all grids are complete, ask the class to examine each individually. By noting which location received the most pluses, students should be able to determine which location *best* meets all criteria for that particular building. The students are now ready to decide where each building will be placed in their town. (For example, in our case, students decided that location B was best for the hospital, D for the factory, etc.)

9. After the class determines the locations of the five buildings, have students decorate milk cartons representing the buildings, and place them on the map. (Fasten to sheet, if necessary.)

10. Now that some of the essential buildings have been "constructed," plan a discussion on transportation needs. Ask the class: (1) Does the highway need to be extended? Where? (2) Are more small roads needed? Where? (3) Does the town need an airport? Where should it be located? Will we need to use any of our natural open spaces? Once the class has decided on its town's needs, they can make the changes on the map.

11. Instruct the class to examine their model town and its buildings in order to determine what other types of buildings and businesses their town still needs. Students should focus on the goods and services people want. Suggestions are: churches, police/fire stations, gas station, department store.

Ask the class to rank the list of buildings according to their importance to the townspeople. Create a role playing activity in which students are required to argue the case "for" or "against" the "construction" of buildings in certain locations. Make certain that students consider *new* criteria, e.g., access to airport, low air pollution, etc.

12. As students attempt to locate their new buildings in town, they will realize that space is becoming scarce and compromises must be made regarding the best locations. Also, the balance between desirable "open space" and "new buildings" will become more and more difficult to maintain. Remind the class that as more factories and industries are introduced, more workers will need homes and apartments. These issues could be discussed at a town forum.

13. To conclude, provide an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned. Explain to the class that the criteria they used in deciding the location of buildings in their *model* town are similar to the criteria used by their *own* town/city officials in approving the construction of local buildings. Select four or five different buildings in your locality which provide various goods and services to your town/city (e.g., town incinerator, theater, electronics factory, library). As a class, discuss the criteria town officials should have used in deciding where to locate each building. Divide the class into groups and assign one building to each group. Using the criteria selected, ask each group to discuss and evaluate the location of *their* particular building in town. Ask each group to give reasons why their town/city officials made a wise or unwise decision in choosing that building's location.

(continued from page 3)

possible solutions, requires that the decision maker gather information.

Assign the students the task of discussing several possible solutions that were not initially considered. Focus on questions such as, "What are some other possible solutions to the problem? What criteria should be used?" (When purchasing, e.g., criteria such as cost, durability and preference.) To carry out this task, students will begin to hypothesize about other sequences of events and draw conclusions from the new situations. In our story, students might suggest that Mark and Mary could buy items that could be used to make *more* money, such as buckets and sponges to start a car washing business. A possible situation might be that Mary will want to buy a blouse instead of a paperback book, which will leave her little to save. Encourage students to describe a number of alternative ways that Mary and Mark might resolve their problem.

4. Evaluating Alternatives

The fourth skill is the *evaluation of possible consequences* or the results of each alternative. To establish and analyze these sequences, the decision maker may engage in predicting, graphing, defining and interpreting. After evaluating the likely consequences of each sequence, the most desirable one is chosen. The decision maker should consider the marginal or incremental benefit that will result from choosing a given alternative over others. Again, a review of priorities will help. This evaluating process is carried out by addressing such questions as, "What alternatives will best meet our goals or values? What alternatives enjoy the most benefits at the least social and personal cost? What are some of the risks involved in each possible solution? What alternatives are most realistic in terms of our present situation (knowledge, resources, and time)?"

Based upon this analysis, the students should decide the best purchase and amount to save for Mark and Mary. Part of the analysis should include a discussion of the goals they believe Mary and Mark have for each birthday gift. For example, "What does Mark hope to achieve by buying the hockey stick?" (practice more, make the team, etc.) "Do the twins plan to meet the expectations of their grandparents?" Tentative solutions may be ranked according to how each one meets their goals.

5. Implementing a Decision

Once an alternative is chosen, the next task is to carry it out. *Implementing a decision* requires management skills. In all probability there will be obstacles to overcome and alterations to be made. Often economic decisions that seem to be a solution to *one* problem, create *others* that need resolution. In purchasing an automobile, e.g., an individual must determine how to manage the high monthly payments along with other financial responsibilities. Will s/he learn to economize, work overtime, take a part-time job, or use savings to meet the payments? Management skills are required to implement such decisions successfully.

In Mark and Mary's case, the students should choose the "best" alternative plan, then list the steps they would need to take in order to purchase the items or to save. The students should consider how they would evaluate the decision Mark and Mary made. Was their decision appropriate? Are they and their grandparents satisfied with their decision? Answers to such questions help students evaluate whether the right choice was made.

Similar situations occur daily in our lives and the argument here is that the practice of making economic decisions can help make life a little more rational, and perhaps, more meaningful and rewarding.

We hope this article will be helpful in reflecting on the thought processes typically used in decision making. There are several well-known instructional strategies built upon the conceptual model described in this article. The widely-used *Decision Grid* (see Teaching Activities 5-6) is part of a five-step process taught in the Joint Council's "Trade-offs" film/video series.[1] Another instructional device, labelled the *Decision Tree* by LaRaus and Remy[2] (see Teaching Activities 1-2 and 3-4) differs from the "Trade-offs" strategy primarily in the method for evaluating alternatives. In the "Trade-offs" model, students generate a set of criteria against which each alternative is measured, while in the *Decision-Tree* the consideration of positive and negative consequences (with respect to one's goals and values) helps the decision maker evaluate alternatives.

[1] "Trade-offs." Joint Council on Economic Education, Canadian Foundation for Economic Education, and Agency for Instructional Technology, 1978.

[2] *Citizenship Decision-Making*. Roger LaRaus and Richard C. Remy. Addison-Wesley, 1978.

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